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# Unpenned

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# *Unpenned*: A Senior Voice Recital

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Honors Project

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IHRTLUHC

Introduction and Background:

*Unpenned* is the story of a female singer discovering her voice in a world defined by the male composer's quill. It is told from the perspective of a vocal performance student preparing for her senior recital during a pandemic and explores baroque and romantic styles, eventually moving into contemporary art song, alternative rock and R&B as the student realizes the expanse of narrative and musical forms through which she can express herself. With this musical journey comes an exploration of female characters, some operatic, and some I've created based on stereotypes of women as depicted in films, musicals, books and other forms of literary narrative. Each woman brings her own struggle and sense of power to this journey of self-discovery.

The visuals for each piece enhance the stages of loss, abuse, anger, reclamation of power and finally enlightenment as she peels back the layers of constraints she faces as a female singer. Ultimately, she finds her voice in each manifestation of herself, mirrored in the characters she represents, and finally finds power in her own original music. My own journey in finding the voice to tell this story began last spring at the start of the pandemic. Sitting in my dorm room, uncertain of the future and my path forward as a singer, I asked myself several questions: How can I continue to share my voice when live performance is not possible? What kind of artist do I want to be and what parts of myself do I want to share through my art? And finally, what other talents and skills can I capitalize on and grow in this moment? I knew I wanted the project to be a culmination of my experience at Lawrence, but also a hopeful nod to, and celebration of, my future and the futures of other female singers struggling to find their voices in today's world. To do so, I needed to use my whole self, not only the singer and recital programmer side of me, but the actress, English major, songwriter, poet, organizer, marketer, creative director and filmmaker sides, some of which I discovered through this process.

While *Unpenned* is a personal story, it is also a universal one. The idea to program a recital about women "taking back the pen" sprang from a class called "Opera and Betrayal," taught by Professor Julie McQuinn. In the class, we studied various aspects of violence in opera, which are traditionally performed onstage and left without discussion. One narrative that stuck out was the cruelty female characters have faced on the operatic stage. Women are killed, abandoned, raped, silenced, imprisoned and disrespected on the basis of their sex throughout operatic history and culture. In Catherine Clément's book, *Opera, or, the Undoing of Women*, she describes a "parade of dying women, arguing that opera's plots inflict violence upon women and that its gorgeous music glosses over that violence" (Cusick and Hershberger 215).[1] These women, "[h]umiliated, hunted, driven mad, burnt alive, stabbed, committing suicide—Violetta, Sieglinde, Lucia, Brünnhilde, Aida, Norma, Melisande, Liu, Butterfly, Isolde, Lulu, and so many others" are "all sopranos, and all victims" (Clément 10). In creating my own project, I needed to find a way to help these women take their power back, both for their sakes and my own as a female singer. I wanted to show how their stories can be re-framed and reclaimed in our modern world. Besides the representation of women in opera, the culture and tradition of classical music is inherently misogynistic. As a young female singer entering the world of classical music, an essence of tradition was instilled in me from the start. The pieces I needed to master were all by white European men, there were specific rules in auditioning that had to be followed and my clothing and its modesty was taken into consideration when I was performing. I remember receiving comments on my voice type, the type of woman and singer I would be because of it, and even my breast size. This is how I entered a classical conservatory. It wasn't until I began studying with Professor Gomez that I felt truly confident in who I am as a singer. She helped me

[1] Paraphrasing Clément in their article "Sexual Violence in Opera: Scholarship, Pedagogy, and Production as Resistance."

unlock the sounds that feel the most like my voice, and to take risks in what I use it for. While I will never stop learning about my voice, she has helped guide me to a version that is intrinsically mine. This story of self-discovery, and all the emotions that come with it, is the basis of *Unpenned.*

Process:

The idea to put the recital on screen didn't occur to me initially. I had spent most of my summer on the set of a television show pilot discovering my film acting skills. In addition to playing a role in the show, I had the opportunity to stand in for the lead actress and spent a lot of time on set absorbing all aspects of the filming process. I got to know the crew well and watched as they set up shots. Seeing the lead actress in her element, how she knew where the camera was without looking and angled herself perfectly every time, was an outstanding learning experience. By the time the filming was over, I knew I wanted to experiment more with this medium, so I approached Alex Quade, a recent Lawrence alum and a PA working on the show. Making our own film seemed like the perfect way to learn more and provided the unique opportunity to present an innovative recital format during a pandemic where live performance was impossible. Alex not only brought knowledge of the technical side of filmmaking, but he was equally eager to learn more and an artist in his own right struggling to find a creative outlet during these difficult times.

Our process, which started off shakily, became a well-oiled machine by the end. With each piece we recorded, I presented Alex with a concept for the filmed scene. I created mood boards, storylines, and shot lists, outlining everything from the sets to the costumes, props, timing of the shoots, and information on the character I would be portraying and their significance to the story. I spent the week before a shoot gathering all the materials, heading to

various thrift stores to try and keep our waste and costs low, and working with various departments at Lawrence, like the costume shop, who helped supply materials and space for shoots. In order to get everything done in time, we spent weekends shooting sometimes several scenes per day, and weeknights editing the scenes together with the recordings. I updated our master spreadsheet each week with what we had recorded, filmed, edited, and colored, along with plans for the next piece's scene.

This is not to say however that we didn't face any obstacles along the way. Halfway through, the hard drive containing all the footage was damaged and many scenes had to be re-shot after winter break. We lost access to a space we had been counting on to film in and had to quickly reach out to Lawrence and community members for new venues. Because of the pandemic we were limited to the number of people we could have on set, and besides a few scenes, it was just the two of us managing the lighting, camera, sets, costumes, props, hair and makeup. Each impediment we faced, ended up providing an important skill and lesson. Re-shooting the lost scenes allowed me to slow down and add missing pieces that made the new scenes even better in the end. Losing our space forced me to make connections with some incredible community members who we are now working closely with on other projects. Their venues added a new look and feel to the film which ultimately made it more engaging and cohesive. Having just the two of us on set on any given day not only made us pay careful attention to every aspect of the filmmaking process, but created a creative trust between us that only added to the final product. I intimately knew these pieces and the story I needed to tell with them, and together, we were able to convey them to film.

Recital analysis:

Intro.

*Unpenned* has an outer and inner storyline, though the two are closely intertwined. The inner world of the film is separated into chapters, each one representing a different stage of the main character's journey (let's call her E), through the patriarchal classical music world to find a voice on her own terms. These chapters are as follows: "Loss," "Madness," "Anger, Friendship, Perseverance," "Reclamation" and "Enlightenment." In the outer story, E is preparing for her senior recital in "real time." We see her going through the motions; practicing, choosing repertoire, etc., at first begrudgingly, and then excitedly as she acknowledges her agency. In this section, I will present an in-depth analysis of each scene, including some musical analysis, the research behind the characters that are depicted and created, notes on materials that inspired me, filming technique, mood board creations, and the translations or poetry for each piece.

Transition 1.

The opening shot is of Main Hall in late afternoon. The sun is just starting to set above the building, a familiar view for a conservatory student entering or leaving Shattuck Hall. We see a figure enter the frame, walking briskly in a black coat and hat, carrying a piece of paper. She doesn't hesitate as she opens the door to her left and buzzes into the building. It's not until she turns to open the next set of double doors that we see her mask. I imagine watching this film a few years down the line, seeing myself masked in these spaces will have a different impact than today's pandemic-defined daily reality which, though a part of our every-day lives, is still uncommon to see on film. I wanted these scenes to take place in "real life" to reflect the hardships of the pandemic and what we had to deal with while creating this story, a reality that greatly influenced the whole project.

The music in this scene, and in all the transitions between chapters, is written and performed by Ben Johnson ’22, a piano student and friend. When approaching him with the project, I asked him to write a theme for the main character, one that could be adapted to her emotional journey. In these opening shots we hear E’s G minor waltz, a simple and melancholy pattern that winds and repeats. What Ben came up with mirrors her emotional state at the beginning of the film perfectly. She is lonely, lost, and dutifully preparing for her senior voice recital.

We follow E as she makes her way down the stairs to the empty basement lobby of Shattuck, crosses the expanse between stairs and the bulletin board, and pins up her recital poster. We kept this shot long and moved the camera with her, so the audience can feel the same sense of weariness E does. The hallway even seems to double in length at this close angle. She pins up the poster and the camera lingers on her face as she surveys it critically. The poster itself is plain, with a photo of E at the center and some composers’ names at the bottom. I purposely left out the composers who come later in the program and are featured in the chapters “Reclamation” and “Enlightenment,” where she finds her joy and power again. As E steps back from her poster and exits the frame, presumably off to prepare, the *Unpenned* title appears, followed by a shot of E’s hand opening a closed notebook on Ben’s last rolled chord. She opens to the first page which states in calligraphy: “I. Loss.” Each chapter begins with a title presented in this way; E’s hand flipping the pages of her own story in her own writing.

**Chapter I. Loss**

<u>Persephone</u>

The first piece in the recital is Proserpina’s recitative from Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo*, *“Signor, quel infelice.”* Proserpina, Italian for Persephone, comes to her captor Hades and begs

him to let Orpheus and Eurydice return to the world of the living. Taking center stage, her pleading words for the unhappy couple, speak to her own situation as a caged goddess in death's underworld:

> My lord, this unhappy man
> who wanders through death's vast country
> goes along, crying "Eurydice!"
> you have never heard
> such plaintive grieving.
> He has stirred so much compassion
> in my heart
> that once again I turn to you, begging
> that your godhead may listen to his prayers.
>
> If ever you felt sweetness
> from these loving eyes,
> if my face has ever charmed you
> so that you call to your heaven,
> swear to me you will not envy Jove's fortune,
> I plead, I beg you by the fire of love that
> once set your soul ablaze,
> permit Eurydice to return to the daylight
> which she used to brighten with her singing,
> and console the broken-hearted Orpheus.

I wanted to emulate the "caged woman" trope, which is so often portrayed in opera, in Persephone's scene, but also show her power above ground. The myth states that in the months when Hades allows her to visit the land of the living, her powers cause spring and summer to bloom and crops to grow. This dichotomy between the death she experiences in the prison of the underworld and the life she still brings every spring, is what inspired me most when building the scene. In the deal she makes with Hades, Persephone represents women's lack of power and sacrifice in forced marital relationships.

At the top of the scene we pan up on Persephone's throne. She appears regal, holding a sheaf of dried grasses along with fresh ones and live sunflowers to symbolize her reign over living and dead. She wears a classic toga pinned at the shoulder, mimicking the bronze statue in the lower right of the first mood board. On her head is a crown of leaves, a common headdress among the Roman gods and goddesses. Hanging on and around the throne are symbols of bounty and life such as grapes, apples, squash, pitchers of feathers and flowers, and pomegranates. In the next cut we see Persephone holding one of these pomegranates out to the viewer. Pomegranates are especially important in Persephone's story because it is her mistake in eating a few of the

tempting fruit's seeds that ties her infinitely to her captor Hades. Pomegranates have been revered in many of the world's cultures and religions for centuries and represent life, fertility and marriage.[2] I wanted to make the pomegranate the focus in this scene because it represents Persephone's greatest power as a giver of life, and her greatest weakness: temptation.

Interspersed with Persephone on her throne are scenes of her in a cage made of twine. Scattered around the base of the cage are the remnants of the dry grasses she held in the opening shot, and dead flowers sit in vases around her stool. We see her for the first time in this position sitting very erect, just as regally as she was on her throne. Wearing a ragged dress and smeared with dirt, she still reigns from her enclosure. She holds the now dead sunflowers, twisting them in her hands, a sign of the strain she endures in the underworld. As the scene progresses, she becomes increasingly distraught, coming to the edge of her cage on the word "pregoti," meaning, "I plead." She pulls at her enclosure, signifying the pleading is not only for Orpheus and Eurydice, but for her own freedom as Hades's most prized prisoner.

The climax of the scene occurs when Persephone splits the pomegranate she is holding out to the audience, the juice dripping between her fingers and her gaze fixed on the fruit. The symbol of two pomegranate halves occurs in many cultures, most often in weddings. Sometimes the rosy cheeks of a bride, sometimes a gift to encourage the couple's fertility, Persephone's offering in this moment is self-sacrificial.[3] This is especially underlined by the words she sings, begging Hades to "permit Eurydice to return to the daylight." She offers up her life giving abilities and womanhood, knowing she is fated to remain in the underworld, so the couple can happily live out their marriage above. The final shots are of Persephone on her throne pinching

[2] Langley, Patricia. "Why a Pomegranate?" *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)*, BMJ, 4 Nov. 2000, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1118911/.
[3] Ibid.

out a candle, signifiying the sharp pain of loss, followed by a pan across her now unoccupied cage. Only the dead flowers remain where she sat before, revealing a beauty in death and emphasizing her sacrifice.

Persephone above[4]

Persephone below

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend

The next piece, *Così mi disprezzate*, by Frescobaldi, is a baroque art song performed from the point of view of a scorned lover. Her partner has gone off with a younger woman, which is implied in the text when she comments on how "blonde curls" and "rosy cheeks" fade quickly:

[4] I will be including mood boards throughout the paper that contain pictures from various internet sources I pulled for inspiration and reference when designing each scene.

Do you so despise me?
Do you tease me so?
The time will come, when
Love will do with your heart
what you do to mine.
No more words - goodbye.
Go ahead, torment me,
mock my sighs,
deny me mercy,
insult my faith
soon you will see in yourself
what you make of me**.**

Beauty does not reign
forever
though it teaches you
to despise my faithfulness.
Believe me,
if today you murder me,
tomorrow you will be sorry.
I do not deny that in you,
love has its merits;
but I know that time shatters
beauty, which flees and passes.

If you don't wish to suffer
love,
I don't need to suffer you.
Your hair, all blonde curls,
your cheeks so rosy-fair,
will soon be gone,
faster than a fleeting month of
May.
Praise them if you like,
the last laugh is mine.

I wanted to play with the "crazy ex-girlfriend" stereotype, re-framing her narrative from the gendered hysteria placed on women in relationships with heterosexual men, to one of catharsis. Helen Saunston, Professor of English Language and Linguistics at York St. John University says that throughout history, "hysteria has been cast as a sex-selective disorder," noting that the word itself is derived from the Greek term "hystera," meaning uterus (Spratt 3). Today, women who express their anger at being blamed, lied to, pathologized, and who generally refuse to be treated in a substandard way by their ex partners, are dismissed as "crazy" and out of control. In this scene, our character takes ownership of the "crazy" stereotype, allowing herself to act on all the mixed emotions that come with the loss of love without judgement.

The scene starts with a shot of her sitting at a boudoir mirror and putting on makeup. I was inspired by the television show aptly titled, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, a musical comedy about a woman who drops everything to follow an ex from summer camp. One of the funniest songs in the show is called "The Sexy Getting Ready Song," a musical jab at how the female process of getting ready for an event is fetishized.[5] While the character in the TV show nervously puts on lipstick and waxes every part of herself in anticipation of possibly running into her love interest,

[5] Ivie, Devon. "Rachel Bloom Tells the Stories Behind 8 Crazy Ex-Girlfriend Songs." *Vulture*, Vulture, 15 Apr. 2016, www.vulture.com/2016/04/crazy-ex-girlfriend-songs-backstories.html.

the woman in my scene goes through these familiar motions in an attempt to feel good about herself after a break-up. We can sense her inner-turmoil as she frustratedly applies eyeshadow and mascara, her hand slipping at one point and poking herself with the wand. After acting on her immediate instinct to make herself desirable again, she realizes what she's doing and wipes the lipstick across her face, subverting the patriarchal system that is destroying her by refusing to participate. Instead, she chooses to act on her emotions instead of covering them up, which is represented in the interspersed shots. She starts by throwing dishes and her ex's clothing down the stairs and stomping on his glasses, but eventually, things get absurd. She throws raw eggs at the wall, dumps cereal off of a balcony, and pours milk over her own head. We realize that rather than attempting to cover up her emotions by prettifying herself to fit the patriarchal standards of female beauty, questioning and breaking away from the system that defines a woman's worth by breaking the rules of "good" behavior brings her the most relief.

Bonduca

Purcell's opera *Bonduca* is based on the 1647 Jacobean tragi-comedy, *The Tragedy of Bonduca*, by Beaumont and Fletcher. The play follows the true events of the British Celtic queen, Boudicca, who led a revolt against the Romans in 60-61 AD. The opera itself though

principally follows the men of the story; her brother-in-law and General of the Britons who becomes the hero, and Junius and Petillius, the Roman officers who fall in love with Bonduca's daughters.[6] In my version, which features her final aria *O, Lead Me to Some Peaceful Gloom,* I wanted to give Bonduca her rightful attention and respect as Queen in this climactic moment. Her story is a truly tragic one. After her husband, king of the Iceni, died, her land was plundered by the Romans who enslaved her people, flogged her, and raped her two daughters.[7] Bruised and bloody, she and her daughters take a chariot ride to drum up courage amongst her people and attack the Romans. On this ride she makes her famous statement: "If you weigh well the strengths of our armies you will see that in this battle we must conquer or die. This is a woman's resolve. As for the men, they may live or be slaves."[8] When she and her daughters are finally surrounded by the Romans with no way out, she forces one daughter to stab herself, and drinks poison with the other, choosing suicide over being taken alive by her enemies.[9] Her final aria comes at the moment she makes the decision to die.

I attempted to show that strength by portraying Bonduca as a warrior queen, dressed in furs and painted in blue Celtic markings to symbolize her heritage. On her cheeks are triskeles, the symbol of body, mind and spirit.[10] These three allude to the holy trinity, as well as life, death and rebirth, and together represent one of the oldest symbols in the Irish tradition.[11] In my version, they point to the legacy she left behind in her brave actions, and while she has to die in the end, her strength is reborn in the Iceni women who follow after. On her forehead is a sign of

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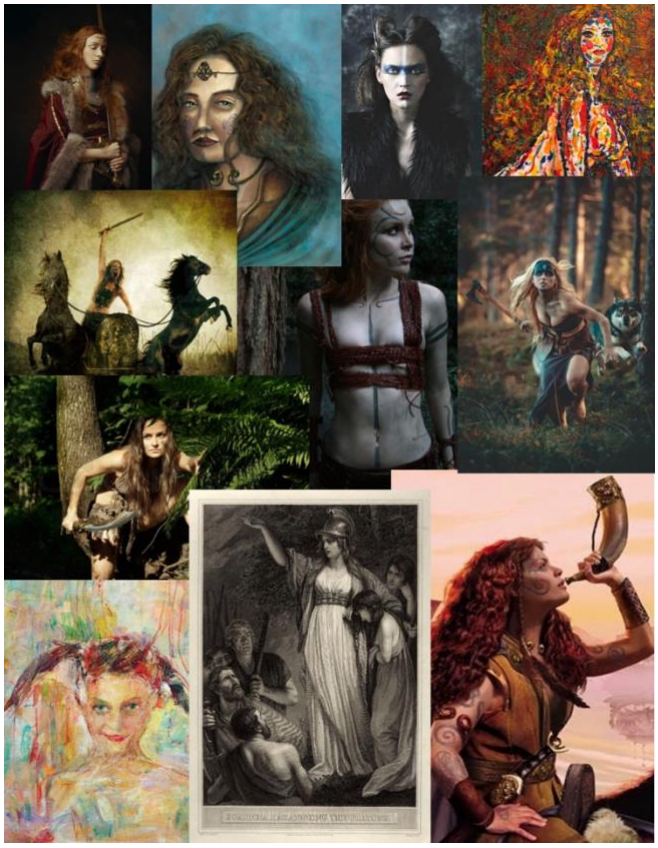
[6] Hoy, Cyrus. "The Shares of Fletcher and His Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon," *Studies in Bibliography*, VIII-XV, 1956–62.
[7] Johnson, Ben. "Queen Boudica (Boadicea) of the Iceni." *Historic UK*, The History and Heritage Accommodation Guide, 2013, www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Boudica/.
[8] Ibid. Quoting Boudicca.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Devlin, Emma. "Ancient Celtic Symbols and Their Meanings." *IrishCentral.com*, IrishCentral, 22 Dec. 2020, www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/celtic-symbols-meanings.
[11] Ibid.

protection. The scene starts with a shot of fall leaves on the grass. In my desire to highlight the land she so fiercely protected over all else, I focused on nature shots throughout the scene. We pan up first on her sitting regally with a large stick she uses as a staff. This pan is reminiscent of the first shot of Persephone, connecting the two sacrificial queens. While Bonduca doesn't have a real throne, she surveys her lands as owner and caretaker. She sings:

> O, lead me to some peaceful gloom
> Where none but sighing lovers come;
> Where the shrill trumpets never sound,
> Never sound.
> But one eternal hush goes round.
> There let me soothe my pleasing pain
> and never think of war again.
> What glory can a lover have,
> to conquer yet be still a slave?



As she arrives at the end of her journey on earth, Bonduca desires only peace. I tried my best to give her that through an uninterrupted communion with the land around her. In the final shot of the chapter, Bonduca looks into the camera, turns, and walks off into the forest, signifying that her loss of life was her own choice, and hers alone.

Transition 2.

Back in real time, E visits to the library to do some research. We see her looking for books in the stacks, flipping through some, and walking with them through the Milwaukee-Downer room to find a place to sit and take notes. In these transitions, my goal was to include personal aspects of my time at Lawrence, and this

particular room in the library was where I spent many an evening writing papers and doing research. One detail that complicated filming this scene was the university Covid requirement to wear gloves when touching the books. While unsettling at first, seeing the gloves in these shots is a palpable reminder of the severity of the pandemic. The G minor waltz continues in this scene, ebbing and flowing with E's movements, and picking up speed as she makes connections and discoveries while taking notes. The library scene more importantly shows the academic side of vocal performance. Delving into texts, historical context, and musical analysis are essential for a singer's process to fully embody a piece of music. As the camera fades out on her note taking, the notebook with the first chapter title appears. She flips the page to "II. Madness," and the next set begins.

## Chapter II. Madness

*Drei Lieder der Ophelia*

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has two major female characters, one of them is Ophelia, the girl most famous for going crazy and committing suicide towards the end of the play. Out of the 1,480 lines in *Hamlet,* Ophelia lays claim to a meager 58.[12] While today, she is one of the most recognizable and discussed characters from the play, she is also the most misunderstood and grossly underdeveloped. She is subject to sexist rants from Hamlet about the scheming and lustful ways of women. She is forced to appease the men of the court, used as a pawn for their plots, and sexually objectified by both her father and Hamlet himself. When her father dies by Hamlet's hand, she goes crazy, not only out of grief, but due to the weight of the constant psychological and emotional abuse she's been subjected to.[13]

[12] Charney, Maurice, and Hanna Charney. "The Language of Madwomen in Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists." *Signs*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1977, pp. 451–460. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3173295.
[13] Ibid.

"Wie erkenn ich mein Treulieb vor andern nun" (Maze)

Strauss's setting of *Ophelia Lieder* takes the strophic songs she sings during her mad scene and translates them into eerie expressionist music. The first piece starts with a cycling chromatic right hand melody, expressing Ophelia's uncertainty and instability in this moment.[14] I related this repetitive motif to one of her spoken lines in this scene; "O, how the wheel becomes it," which I use to describe the cyclical feelings that come with depression (Shakespeare, 4.5, line 155). Many know Ophelia for her suicide in *Hamlet,* but in my version, I wanted to give her time to express herself after the fact, which is why I start her first song as if she has already drowned herself. Dripping wet and wearing a long white gown to represent her ghostly form, she finds herself lost in a dark maze of hallways. In the first shot we see her find scattered flowers on the ground, illuminated by a spotlight. This scene foreshadows the last song in the cycle which takes place partially in a bathtub full of flowers, representing her final resting place.

She sings:

> How will I know my true love from others now?
> By his cockle hat and staff
> and his sandal shoes?
> He is dead and long gone,
> Dead and gone, Lady.
> At his head green grass,
> At his feet a stone. O, ho!
> On his shroud white as snow
> Many sweet flowers mourn.
> They'll go drenched to the grave, alas,
> wet with love's showers.

This text has been translated three times, first from Shakespeare's text to Strauss's German, and then back again to English. In my translation, I tried to stay true to Shakespeare's poetic style, while making it accessible for the modern viewer. In that same vein, I attempted to

[14] Ibid.

show Ophelia's mental state in this moment of the play through my shot choices. Her confusion is palpable, not only in her verbal questioning and the unstable music underneath her, but by the darkened hallways she moves through, touching various meaningful objects like the scattered and dead flowers, and by the interspersed close ups of her dripping limbs as she steadies herself against the walls or walks through puddles she has formed herself. There is a sense of this hallway being circular, or never ending, much like the repetitive piano part. In fact, she ends up right back where she started at the end of the piece, a direct representation of her circling thoughts.

One of the most significant moments in the scene is when she catches sight of herself in a mirror on the wall and walks towards it to look closer. The viewer only realizes that they are seeing her reflection in the mirror, and not her true form, until she passes the camera to touch her face's reflection. The shot was difficult to execute, but important as it reveals the multiple layers of Ophelia's psyche. After the abuse she has experienced, her grasp on her own identity has become murky. She barely recognizes the damp and disheveled reflection staring back at her, unsure if this is a dream or reality. The physical touching of the mirror and her reflection is an attempt at answering that question and grounding herself outside of her own blurry mind. In much of Shakespeare's work and even in popular culture today, "Madness allows women an emotional intensity and scope not usually expected in conventional feminine roles. Their madness is interpreted as something specifically feminine, whereas the madness of men is not specifically male" (Charney and Charney, 451). We can see the full effect of a patriarchal society on Ophelia's psyche in this moment. In her "madness" she is simply attempting to discern her reality from the tricks and ploys Hamlet and her father have put her through, self-soothing

through nursery rhymes, and reverting to an innocent self in order to come to terms with her objectification and sexual abuse.

"Guten Morgen, 's ist Sankt Valentinstag" (White Room)

As the last scene fades into white, as if Ophelia is going to heaven, a similarly white scene appears. The room is hung with white bed sheets and the light coming through from the windows behind makes it look both heavenly and reminiscent of a mental asylum. Ophelia enters from the right side of the screen, crawling on hands and knees and discovering the space through touch, much like the previous scene. She feels each piece of fabric and looks around her in confusion and awe. The song that she sings is upbeat and sporadic, with sixteenth notes in the piano covering every moment of accompaniment. Strauss interprets Ophelia's mind as flustered and illogical and has her bounce from thought to thought almost without breath. The hardest part of singing this piece was in fact, trying to find opportune moments to catch my breath and keep the quick lines going. In the song, Ophelia does not name herself, but rather speaks about others, singing:

> Good morning, it's Saint Valentine's Day!
> So early before sunrise,
> I, a young maid at the window
> Shall be your Valentine.
> The young man put trousers on,
> Opened up the chamber door,
> Let in the maid who as a maid
> Departed never more.
>
> By Saint Nicholas and Charity,
> What a shameless breed!
> A young man does it when he can,
> Which is, forsooth, not right.
> She said: before you tumbled me,
> You promised me to wed.
> I'd not, by sunlight, have broken my word!
> If you had not come in.

The song is therefore used as a mirror for other characters to see the wrongs they have done her.[15] She sings about sexual assault and coercion, commenting on how men say one thing and mean another and invoking Hamlet's pretenses and manipulations around his passion for her.

[15] Ibid.

The bed sheets surrounding her act as a cage in this scene as she rolls in them, the pure white of the room and the upbeat sing-songy tone of the piece contrast with the disturbing experience she describes.

I wanted this scene to really capture the agitation of Ophelia's mind and the music, so in the editing process we played a lot with tempo. Some sections of the scene are sped up so that her movements seem more frantic. There is a loss of control as she snow-angels out in the space, playing like a child with the string of lights coiled on the floor, and slipping in and out of moments of terror as her thoughts spin. Turning to innocent nursery rhymes, which to those around her seems crazy, is the only way she can cope with the adult sexuality that has been forced upon her. In the final shot she hits her breaking point and screams into the fabric covering her face, an image inspired by Natalie Dessay's portrayal of Ophelia in the Metropolitan Opera's production of *Hamlet* by Ambroise Thomas. The image is included in my mood board for the scene below and portrays Dessay lying sideways and singing with an open mouth from the ground, as if she is screaming. This one tortured snapshot captures Ophelia's pain perfectly because of its tragic rawness and inhibition. She portrays another woman beaten down by the system, expressing her trauma the only way she can.

"Sie trugen ihn aug der Bahre bloß" (Bathtub)

The last piece in the set is the longest and most complex. Strauss fits the rest of Ophelia's mad scene material into this one and breaks it up into a dirge like melodic motif, representing her grief at her father's death, and an upbeat ballad, switching between them abruptly throughout. Mimicking this structure, I used two separate sub-scenes within the scene to tell the story of Ophelia's last words. The first, which begins with the opening chromatic dirge motif, is

Ophelia's processional and prayer sequence. As she sings of her father's funeral, she marches slowly down the stairs of a church and into the chapel to pray.

Her words are:

> They carried him naked on the bier,
> Alas, alas, dear love!
> And into his grave fell many a tear:
> Farewell, farewell, my dove!
> My young sweet Hansel is all my joy,
> Will he not come again?
> He is dead, oh woe!
> To your deathbed go,
> Ne'er will he come again.
> His beard was white as snow,
> His head like flax too.
> He is gone, he is gone,
> Nothing comes of mourning:
> May his soul rest!
> And with all Christian souls! That is my prayer!
> God be with you.

Spliced between her descent and prayers are scenes of Ophelia in a bathtub. The bright green tile of the bathroom together with the potted plants and flowers decorating the rest of the space create an odd explosion of color against the white and black color palettes from the past two scenes. While Ophelia continues to bounce sporadically between lines of thought, at one point grieving for her dead father, and soon after singing of being young and in love, there is ultimately a more grounded feel to this last piece. I wanted to give Ophelia the control over her situation that she deserves while acknowledging the trauma she has faced, so I staged this last piece as if she's already made the decision to die and is finding peace within that choice.

In the chapel scenes, Ophelia wears a white veil with a blue fabric underneath, a head covering reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. Ophelia's spirituality comes to the forefront in her "madness," and as she prays for her father, she also asks forgiveness for "all Christian souls" in her final moments. While her reference to Christian souls could be interpreted as a subversive reaction to the systematic power of the church which condones the patriarchal system, I chose the interpretation that she is crying for help from a higher power. It was important for me to show her vulnerability after she had been so tragically beaten down by the system, and her

realization that her only hope of agency is death. The greater journey to finding a voice and empowerment starts with this cry for help and acknowledgement of the violence and pain we've experienced. Suicide was seen as a sin at this time, especially in the Catholic Church, and Ophelia's own burial rights were questioned by a priest soon after her death.[16] In fact, her death is not even officially declared a suicide, but as an accident.[17] Even in death, Ophelia does not control her own story. In the last few shots, the Mary figure is shown praying with her eyes closed, opening them on a final beat to stare directly into the camera and the viewer's eyes. This not only connects the Mary figure to the Ophelia in the bathtub who does a similar action, but is an ultimate grounding moment, letting the viewer know that she is fully aware of what she is doing and is finally in control.

The bathtub scenes are similarly measured and show her preparing more directly for death. In the play, Ophelia is said to have drowned herself in a brook. Many famous paintings and depictions of Ophelia show her floating in a very small body of water, which we did our best to represent with the bathtub. The flowers represent the "many sweet flowers" that "mourn" and those that go "drenched to the grave" from the first piece. As Ophelia grieves for her own father whom she buried with her own tearful flower offerings, she now takes his place in her watery tomb. There is a sensual aspect to her preparation as well. She plays with the floating flowers, twirling them in her fingertips and brushing them down her neck. There are moments when she smiles to herself in both scenes, content with her decision and process. She is regaining reality in the feeling of her own skin. There are also difficult moments of thrashing and crying amongst the peace and beauty, reminding us of the pain and anger that has brought her to this moment.

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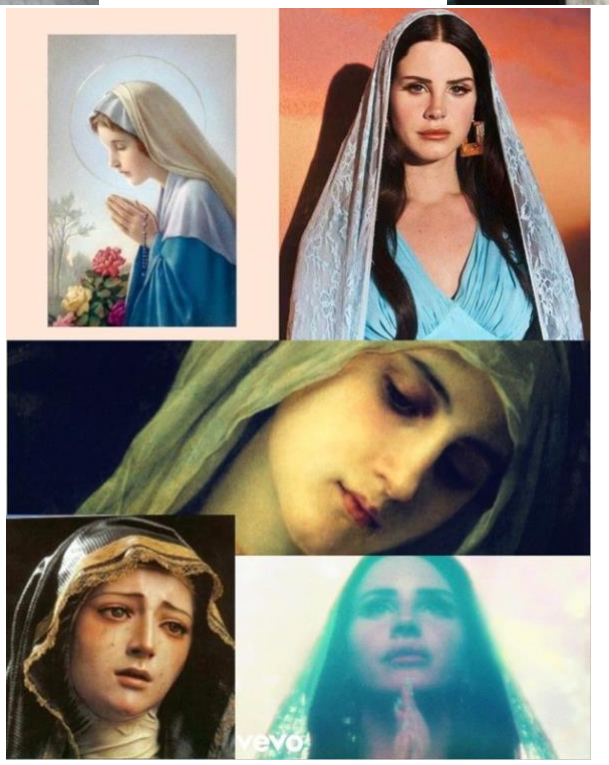
[16] Chapman, Alison A. "Ophelia's 'Old Lauds': Madness and Hagiography in 'Hamlet.'" *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, vol. 20, 2007, pp. 111–135. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24323015.
[17] Ibid.

Finally slipping beneath the surface, she breathes out. The bubbles rising to the surface are seemingly endless, signifying how her last breath has sparked the conversations of today about female suicide. She lives on in these.

Maze/White Room

Bathtub

Mary



Transition 3.

The next transition gives the viewer a peek into what it's like to be a voice student during a pandemic. The first shot is from outside my practice room, which I share with a pod of other singers. Masks are required in all the conservatory spaces, so I am singing my warmups while masked. The piano accompaniment is pensive and almost tentative here, revealing E's uncertainty about her path and her place in the conservatory. A pan down from Professor Gomez's name plate above her door, follows E as she enters the office and sets up for a virtual lesson. E adjusts the microphone volume on the piano, preparing to sing not to a person but a computer screen. There is an aspect of depersonalization in having your live singing translated through technology to the listener's ear, a limitation I grappled with constantly during this time. Was she hearing me right? Do I sound different through the computer? How can I make sure everything is set up right so she can catch the techniques I need to work on? This sense of worry follows her into the studio, as she looks around, adjusts the space, and opens a book of music. The whole scene is also shot as if she is aware of being observed, another symptom of living life virtually through the pandemic. The camera takes on the role of observer, peering through the glass window of the practice room and watching E from the door of Professor Gomez's studio as she sets up.

## Chapter III. Anger, Friendship, Perseverance

50's Housewife (Anger)

The first piece of chapter three is from Handel's very first opera, *Almira*, and occurs after princess Edilia asks her lover to swear an oath of devotion to her. When he refuses, she sings "*Proverai di che fiere saette,*" a rage aria which translates to the lines:

> You will find, you will find,
> You will find just how sharp the arrows are

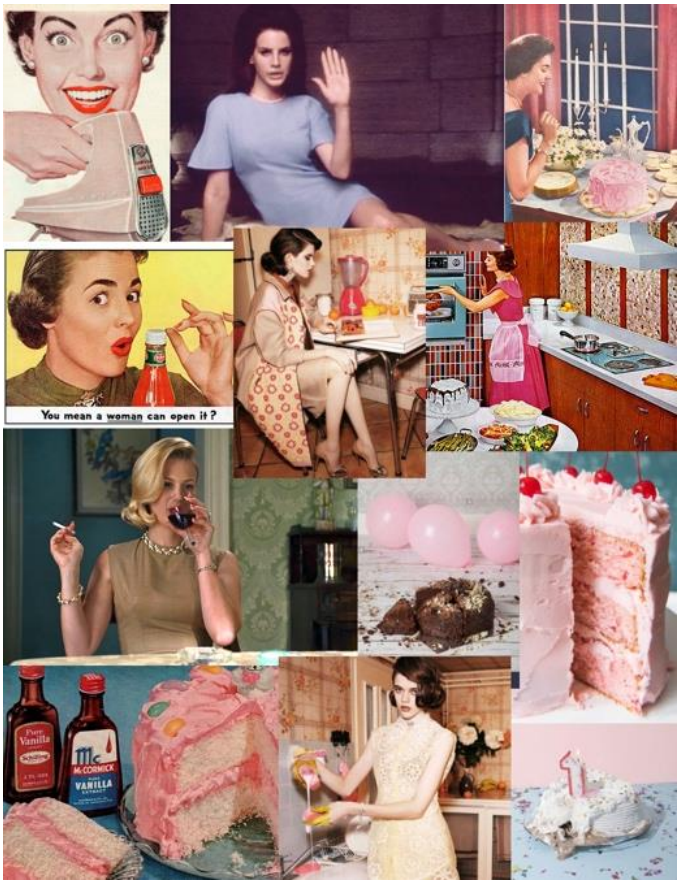
> If you arm the wrath of a betrayed woman.
> Nobility, when scorned,
> Does know how to fashion a swift revenge.

In this scene I played with the housewife trope, dressing Edilia in a 50s/60s style outfit and having her bake a bright pink frosted cake. In the A and B sections of the piece, she robotically stirs, measures, pours, and bakes the cake, smiling into the distance in a nod to the 2004 film *The Stepford Wives*, in which men have turned their wives into cyborgs who cook, clean, and have sex with them whenever they wish. The ideal housewife trope of the the 1950s defines the ideal gender roles as women staying at home to cook, clean, and raise children while men work.[18] This culture constrained women and often did not allow them to live up to their full potential. Women were generally seen as incompetent at anything but housework and child rearing and best kept at home and out of the way.[19] Women were so infantilized, that "a favorite trope of the mid-century was showing men so fed up they took women over their knees and spanked them" (Marcotte).

In light of this oppression, I wanted to present a housewife's revenge in the return to the A section. The reprise starts with Edilia carrying the cake happily into the dining room, setting it down, robotically taking her clothes off, and folding them neatly on a side table. As she sits down to eat one of the slices she has cut, she changes her mind, grabbing the cake in one hand and stuffing it into her mouth. Cake carnage ensues, with close-up shots of clawing through the cake with her long fake nails, licking frosting from her hands, squeezing cake between her fingers and finally smearing the cake across the wall as she leaves. The scene devolves into a

[18] Meyerowitz, Joanne. "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946- 1958." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 79, no. 4, 1993, pp. 1455–1482. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/2080212.
[19] Ibid.

grossly sensual event. The neon, inedible-looking frosting, mixed with her savage enjoyment of the destruction, presents a plainly subversive commentary on her place as a woman in the household. The cake she has baked is for her alone to revel in this ceremony of rebellion, not for her husband or children. The scene ends with her triumphant, shoes in hand, leaving the wreckage behind her. Something tells me she's not going to clean it up.




Tears of Gold (Friendship)

Church bells ring in the next scene, and a bunch of Baby's Breath appears on screen. Baby's Breath are often seen at weddings and symbolize sincerity, everlasting love, compassion, trust, and romance.[20] We then move into a pan up on two women sitting back-to-back, their arms interlaced. The piece is *Pleurs d'Or* by Fauré, a sweeping and romantic art song depicting tears in various contexts. While it's originally a piece for Baritone and Mezzo-Soprano, I wanted only female voices on the recital and decided to sing it with a close friend. The interlocking voice parts and close harmonies were so intimate to sing together, I knew this scene had to be about our friendship and the importance of same sex friendships in a woman's life. The words themselves speak of nature, nuns, long eyelashes, and beloved friends, all things applicable to female experience and the power of sisterhood:

[20] Boeckmann, Catherine. "Flower Meanings: The Language of Flowers." *Old Farmer's Almanac*, 12 Feb. 2020, www.almanac.com/flower-meanings-language-flowers.

Tears hanging from the flowers,
Tears of lost springs
In the mossy hollows of rocks;
Tears of Autumn spreading,
Tears of horns sounding
through the vast melancholy woods;
Tears of convent bells
Carmelites, Feuillantines...
Voices of bells in fervor;

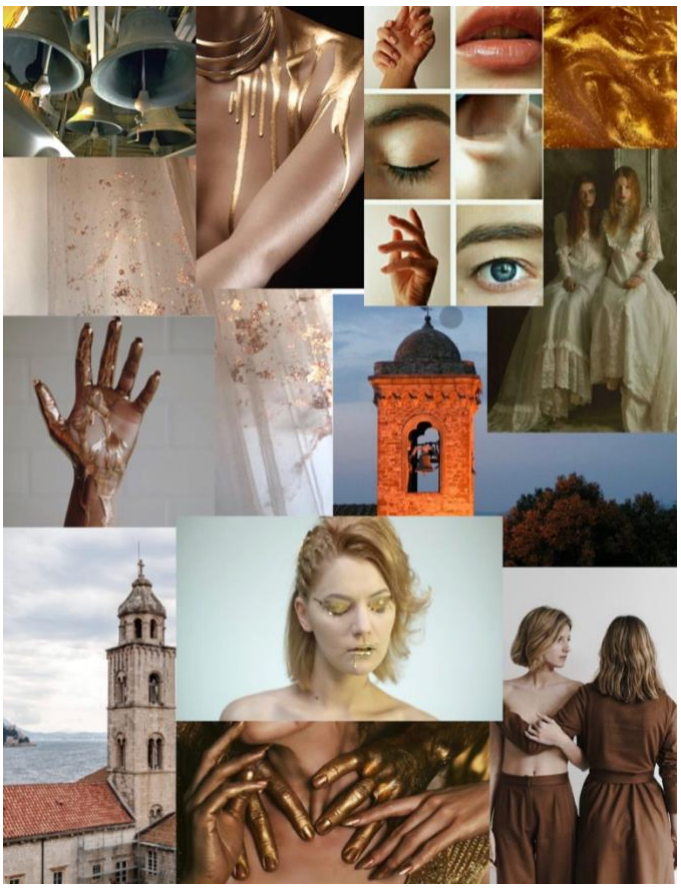
Tears of starry nights,
Tears of hidden flutes
In the blue of a sleeping park;
Pearl tears on long eyelashes,
Lover's tears flowing
To the soul of the beloved friend;
Tears of ecstasy, delicious tears,
Nights fall!
Flowers fall!
Eyes fall!

According to feminist theory, there are "four current markers of female friendship: affection, physical touching, revelation of feelings, and interdependence" (Gardiner 486). In designing the scene, I tried to touch on each of these, showing the entwined existence of these two women through their beginning positions and the wedding dresses they wear. Marriage is an important act reserved for lovers, but powerful female friendships can be just as important, if not more important than women's relationships with men.[21]

As the scene progresses the women help each other get ready for the wedding, buttoning sleeves, zipping dresses, and braiding hair. Their voices come together as the church bell appears, mimicking its hypnotic sway. The arms of the bell also mirror the angles of the arms of the women at work, representing the spiritual bond of sisterhood. They stand together as if at an altar, statuesque. The level of commitment in this friendship is worthy of a ceremony like this one, and they take it seriously. The symbol of the wedding itself, an event where two souls become one, also played into our recording of the piece. In order to feel each other's breaths and sounds more immediately, we faced each other to record, singing as if our voices were coming out of the other's mouth. This proved to be an intimate experience and one that inspired my staging of the piece.

[21] Judith Kegan Gardiner. "Women's Friendships, Feminist Friendships." Feminist Studies, vol. 42, no. 2, 2016, pp. 484–501. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.15767/feministstudies.42.2.0484.

The last sequence starts with one woman painting designs on the other's naked back. Her exposed bare skin represents a vulnerability that is necessary in friendship, and the act of painting on skin shows the care and delicacy required to support the other. Body painting occurs in many cultures across the world and was originally done with natural pigments made from plants.[22] Today, those traditions have continued and occur specifically at important life events, especially weddings.[23] The painting takes a turn as the pair trade off dripping the gold paint over each other's dresses, eventually spreading it over their arms, chests and faces, and pouring various paint filled vases and serving dishes over each other. The messiness of love and friendship is represented in this almost child-like play, though they remain serious in their task. The physical touch marker of female friendship occurs in the sensual, ritual-like spreading of paint on each other's bodies, which becomes a sort of unspoken language between them. Finally, they grasp hands, which are now completely covered in paint, to solidify their symbolic marriage.



Day in a Life

*Amor Dormiglione*, by one of my favorite female composers Barbara Strozzi, takes center stage for this next scene. The story is ultimately "a day in the life" of a voice student, and I take a

[22] Schildkrout, Enid. "Inscribing the Body." Annual Review of Anthropology, vol. 33, 2004, pp. 319–344. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25064856.
[23] Ibid.

brief pause from the heightened staging here to represent the grind, and perseverance it takes to dedicate oneself to this craft. After an uplifting moment of friendship and female support, I reframed this piece to act as positive self-talk for E. She speaks to herself in this scene, urging her "Love" which I think of as her passion and drive, to come alive again:

Love, love, stop sleeping!
Up, up, wake up now
Because when you sleep
My joy also sleeps, anxiety keeps watch.
Love, don't, don't be so bad!
Arrows, arrows, fire, fire
arrows, arrows, up, up
Fire, fire, up, up!
Stop sleeping!
You have to get up
stop sleeping love
you have to get up.
LOVE!
Oh lazy, oh dull
you don't make sense
stupid love
cowardly love!
Ah, while I'm suffering
Burning with passion
You, love, are sleeping:
And what good is that!
Ah while I'm suffering!

The scene starts with a shot of her waking up and getting out of bed. Every shot is sped up in this scene to mimic the urgency in her words and to compress the long day she spends practicing and going to class. We see her pour herself some cereal and sit down to eat while studying a score. As a voice student, I found myself multi-tasking often, at times eating while learning music, sometimes working on theory homework backstage at rehearsal, etc. E begins to pace in the scene, practicing and trying to get the music into her body, a tactic I used a lot to prepare for this recital. To finish up the A section, we see various shots of her walking across the Lawrence campus, another aspect of the life of a conservatory student. Our classes occur on both sides of the street, so I tried to show all the places I would usually walk to in a day, repeating them at various angles to highlight the repetitive nature. As the B section starts, E returns to her room, and after falling asleep over the score she is studying, brushes her teeth and gets in bed, apparently preparing for the cycle to repeat the next day. While this "day in a life" might seem

monotonous, repetition is quintessential to a classical musician's life, both in daily routine and in practicing.

Transition 4.

After a short spell of day-to-day reality, I wanted the next transition to mix real life with the abstract heightened form of the chapters. We filmed this scene at Appleton's Bubolz Nature Preserve with my voice teacher, Estelí Gomez. The transition marks E's shift to empowerment and freedom. As I explained in the introduction, the personal empowerment I experienced when I began studying with Professor Gomez, gave me the confidence to take more risks in my singing, both in the range of my voice and stylistically. Her presence in this scene was imperative, as her support allowed me to envision this film in the first place. I wanted to capture her spirit and the natural exploration she has encouraged in my training without making it stiff or forced, so going on a walk in the preserve, an activity she especially enjoys, seemed like the best approach. The shots are all in slow motion which adds a dream-like quality to the scene. As we walk, we take time to explore the different terrains we happen upon, stopping to play with the cattails, gazing up at the swaying pines, or looking out at a frozen pond. Sometimes she leads and I follow, sometimes I am the leader. In my experience, this trade off depicts the relationship of the voice teacher and voice student well. It's a delicate balance, especially when your instrument (vocal cords) lie between your head and your heart, and therefore are affected equally by both. [24] The piano changes from minor to major gradually in this scene, reinforcing the positive shift E is experiencing. In the final section of the scene, Professor Gomez points down a path in the woods. E follows and they find a clearing decorated with stained glass, scarves, and flowers. This is symbolic of the teacher showing the student an alternative path, one that incorporates all

[24] I will credit this analogy to my first voice teacher, Elizabeth Vrenios.

her parts, a safe space she is free to experiment in. Planting seeds together in the dirt of the clearing, the teacher shows E how to cultivate that exploration, in preparation for one day when she is ready to share her growth with the world.

## Chapter IV. Reclamation

### *Try Me, Good King*

Libby Larsen's cycle *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII*, takes its text from the Queens' letters and gallows speeches. Larsen has always been interested in the queens, but her interest "goes deeper than just the historical aspect; Larsen has 'been really interested in the discarding of wives'" and "observed that this occurs frequently in our present time, as well as the past…especially by very powerful and wealthy men" (Day quoting Larsen 7). In bringing light to the Queens' stories, I was especially drawn to Larsen's composition because she used their true words and pointedly captured their womanhood in her music beyond their history book images. Hers was the perfect setting to show a reclamation of power, not only for the Queens portrayed, but for women whose voices and heads have been taken from them at the hands of powerful men.

I have only included three Queens in my version; the first, fourth, and second in that order, and staged the sequence like a dark carnival of sorts. I imagined each scene occurring in a different tent, with a Queen taking center stage in each to tell her story. This chapter is also the only point in the film where a male figure is shown on screen. He represents Henry VIII, and his whole face is never shown on camera. As the Queens sing their own words, as re-interpreted by a female composer, they are able to fully take back the pen, thereby dimming Henry's power to a headless, faceless, voiceless shadow.

### "Katherine of Aragon" (Fortune Teller)

Queen Katherine of Aragon was sent to London to marry Prince Arthur, but when he died five months into their marriage, she was re-engaged to his younger brother, Henry. When she gave him only one sickly daughter, who would become Queen Mary I, Henry began to look elsewhere and asked for a divorce.[25] After their annulment Henry continued to treat her and Mary badly, isolating Katherine in a house away from her daughter, where she was said to have spent most of her time praying until her death.[26] In a letter to the King, Katherine wrote:

> "My most dear lord, king, and husband, the hour of my death now drawing on, the tender
> love I owe you forces me to commend myself unto you
> and to put you in remembrance of the health and welfare of your soul.
> My most dear lord, king, and husband,
> you have cast me into many calamities and yourself into many troubles. For my part, I
> pardon you ev'rything
> and I wish to devoutly pray God that He will pardon you also.
> For the rest I commend unto you our daughter, Mary,
> beseeching you to be a good father unto her.
> Lastly I make this vow, that my eyes desire you
> above all things, above all things."

This text makes up Larsen's first piece in the set. The compositional style is chant-like, referencing Katherine's Catholic background and dedication to her faith. Larsen also incorporates a lute song into each piece. In this one, the "piano is a deconstruction of 'In Darkness Let me Dwell," a song that "coincides with Katherine's emotional state and situation" (Day 32). The left hand in the piano plays a constant F throughout the entire piece, representing the lute and adding an emotional tension to its song. We play with this repetition in the editing of the scene, often cutting shots together with this rhythm in mind.

The opening shot does this exactly, as Katherine strikes a match on the very first iteration of the F and proceeds to light a candle. The scene is dark, and her gold bangles glitter in the

[25] Day, Angela R. "A Performer's Guide to Libby Larsen's: Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII." *Louisiana State University* , Louisiana State University , 2008, pp. 21.
[26] Ibid.

candlelight. The room is hung with red and black fabrics which match her clothing. I decided to make Katherine the fortune teller in this carnival because of the incredible spirituality and dedication to her faith that she held close throughout her life. While fortune-telling was ultimately looked down upon by the Catholic church, there are also surprising parallels between "the patron saints and icons of Catholicism, each of whom has defining characteristics, occupations, and symbols" and "the characters of the tarot" (Delistrary 6-7). As Henry's first wife, Katherine is the first victim of his cruelty and it is obvious in the pleas she makes to Henry throughout her life that she knows the path he is going down will only lead to disaster.

Katherine continues to prepare her space, winding loose twine around her fingers for a later ritual - invoking the image of a rosary - and pulling a book from the shelf. Queen Katherine was a well-educated woman who spent much of her time reading the Bible and praying. Here, she grounds herself in this book, preparing her spirit for what's to come. We revisit the mirror shot from the first piece in *Ophelia Lieder* as she holds a candle up to her face, tracing her reflection with her finger. I interpreted this moment as a similarly grounding action, taking in her form and authority. The first glimpse we get of Henry is from above as he enters the tent and sits across from the fortune teller, which occurs at the repetition of "My most dear lord, king and husband," as if she is now saying it to him. The next shot shows the tension in Katherine and Henry's relationship, him tapping his fingers impatiently, and her shuffling her deck of tarot cards, preparing to offer judgement.

The cards he pulls are symbolic. I performed a past, present, future spread, revealing the two of cups, the judgement card, and the three of swords. The reading is portrayed accurately except for the pre-chosen cards we showed onscreen. The two of cups represents their past and signifies connection, love and romance. Katherine and Henry were truly in love when they were

married and lived happily for a while. The present card, “judgment,” actually symbolizes forgiveness. She says plainly that she has forgiven him, now she asks him to rise up and do the same for her. The final card, representing future, is a dark and complex card pertaining to betrayal, heartbreak and turmoil. She foresees in this three of swords, her own heartbreak, and that of the other women he will marry and discard. In the reflection of the gilded mirror, she performs a binding ritual, tying their hands together with a red rose between them. This rose was also seen in the image for the two of cups representing romance and is now bound between them as they will forever be in marriage. The Catholic Church did not allow divorce and to Katherine, Henry’s plan was a sin before God. She appeals to his previous love for her, begging him to take care of the daughter they produced through that love. She blindfolds him symbolically as she sings “my eyes desire you above all things,” taking his own sight away and his wandering eye with it. With his eyes now covered, she traces the lines on his palm, giving herself freedom to do so without his watchful gaze which she was constantly under both at court and when in isolation. Blowing out her candle, she bookends her story, letting it burn to an ember in the dark tent.

“Anne of Cleves” (Clown)

Anne of Cleves was Henry's fourth wife, chosen quickly after Jane Seymour's death. Daughter of the Duke of Cleves, Anne was said to be very beautiful, and after seeing her portrait, Henry decided to marry her on the spot. After a long journey from Germany, Anne arrived in England only to be surprised by the king disguised as a messenger who burst in on her unannounced. While she didn't act openly appalled, he could tell by her face she was not enamored with the now fat, bedraggled man before her.[27] Henry was furious that Anne did not "fall in love with him at first sight and chose to get back at Anne by demeaning her looks and calling her childish names" (Day 25). The wedding had to go on, but Henry asked for an annulment soon after. Anne, who disliked Henry considerably at this point, immediately agreed, knowing how he had treated his previous wives who had put up a fight. Henry rewarded her handsomely with a yearly stipend and beautiful manor.[28] She wrote him a letter before their divorce, assuring him of her cooperation which included the words:

> "I have been informed by certain lords
> of the doubts and questions which have been found in our marriage. It may please your majesty to know
> that though this case be most hard and sorrowful
> I have and do accept the clergy for my judges.
> So now the clergy hath given their sentence, hath given their sentence. I approve. I neither can nor will repute myself for your grace's wife, yet it may please your highness to take me for your sister, your sister, for which I most humbly thank you.
> Your majesty's most humble sister, Anne, daughter of Cleves."

From that point on Anne of Cleves was known as Henry's "sister" and never remarried, living out the rest of her life happily in the country on the king's coin.[29]

The song mimics a Ländler, or German folk dance, which usually features heavy stomping and can often be accompanied by yodeling or a vocal part.[30] The lute song Larsen

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[27] Ibid, 25.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid, 26.
[30] Ibid, 55.

pulled from is called "I Care Not for These Ladies," pointing to Henry's dislike of Anne and in the end, her dislike of him, poking fun at their relationship.[31] Larsen also added specific characterizations for certain lines, marking "cheerfully" on "So now the clergy hath given their sentence" and "winking" for "your sister." This precise characterization allowed me to take a closer look at the language and the subtext underneath. As Larsen states in an interview, "there should be a kind of demeanor and quality of 'I outfoxed you…and I am going to give you all the dignity accord[ed] to you in your royal position because I want to'" (Day 59-60).

Anne of Cleves becomes a dancing clown marionette in this scene, filmed in the Teakwood Room at Lawrence. This mocking character seemed to fit perfectly with the piece and also left room to show the darker elements of their relationship. The scene starts by cutting together short clips of different Teakwood Room elements. Right off the bat the music and close ups of various wood carvings and chairs assault the senses. There is an almost comic timing in the cuts along to the music which will continue throughout the scene. We then see Anne's face for the first time, which is cut off beneath the neck in a nod to the beheaded queens before and after her. Her face is painted completely white, similarly to the sad, Pierrot style of clown portrayed in the opera Pagliacci. The makeup acts as a mask as she makes faces and rolls her eyes, setting up her sob story to be just an act. She is obviously "over it" from the very first shot.

Anne makes a lot of direct eye contact with the camera in this scene, breaking the fourth wall and letting the audience in on her true emotions. One important moment of eye contact is when we see King Henry standing behind her, pulling her marionette strings. Arms and limbs flailing, she stares straight into the lens in direct message to the audience of Henry's abuse. She has absolutely no say in the relationship and like the rest of his wives, is seen as only a pawn to

[31] Ibid.

make children with. There are other more comedic moments of eye contact. For example, when Anne and Henry are seated in the once empty chairs from the opening sequence, she tries to get his attention by making funny faces and fluffing her tutu, glancing toward the camera as if she's saying "See! What am I supposed to do with this guy?!" In the second to last shot, which is the longest cut in the scene, Anne stares directly at the camera while resting her head on Henry's knees, ironically showing her as his little sister. The eeriness of the rocking horse moving by itself, and her deadpan stare, is meant to remind the audience of the injustice she's experienced. In order to keep her head, she has to lower herself in his eyes, no longer his queen, but as a sister he can ignore, or boss around, as he pleases.

"Anne Boleyn" (Cabaret)

Anne Boleyn is the most mythicized and infamous queens of Henry's reign. During and after her time, she was seen as a temptress, a whore, a witch, a usurper, a manipulative tease, and an adulterer. The truth in that no one really knows who she was besides what the court let be said about her. Records by her own hand are few and far between. What we *do* know, is that Anne caught Henry's eye while serving as a lady-in-waiting for Queen Katherine.[32] Her year-long

[32] Ibid, 21.

rejection of his advances only made his desire stronger, and he pursued her relentlessly until she finally gave in when he promised to divorce Katherine and marry her instead.[33] Anne fell pregnant soon after they were married and gave birth to Princess Elizabeth who would later become Queen of England.[34] When she was unable to bear a son, Henry became bored with her overbearing demeanor and his eye wandered again, this time to Jane Seymour.[35] Anne's last miscarriage was the final straw. He neatly framed her for adultery and chopped her head off without a second thought.[36]

Anne did not go quietly though, and wrote a powerful letter to Henry from her prison in the Tower of London. This letter included these words, which have been reconstructed to fit Larsen's composition:

"Try me, good king, let me have a lawful trial
and let not my enemies sit as my accusers and judges.
Try me, good king, let me receive an open trial for my truth shall fear no open shame. Never a prince had a wife more loyal, more loyal in all duty,
never a prince had a wife more loyal, more loyal in all true affection,
never a prince had a wife more loyal than you have found in Anne Bulen.
You have chosen me from low estate to be your wife and companion.
Do you not remember the words of your own true hand?
'My own darling, I would you were in my arms
for I think it long since I kissed you, my mistress and my friend.'
Do you not remember the words of your own true hand?
Try me, good king, Try me.
If ever I have found favor in your sight,
if ever the name of Anne Bulen has been pleasing to your ears,
if ever I have found favor in the sight,
if ever the name of Anne Bulen has been pleasing to your ears,
let me obtain this request and my innocence shall be known.
Let me obtain this request and my innocence shall be cleared.
Try me. Try me. Try me."

[33] Ibid, 22.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid, 23.

These words make up the majority of the piece, but Larsen also includes the addendum of Anne's execution. The words in this section are the same words Anne spoke on the day she died. It was "the protocol of the times, to acknowledge the King's welfare, before her execution" and she does so slowly, repeating some of the words over to herself as she prepares herself for death (Day 47):

"Good Christian people, I come hither to die and by the law I am judged to die. I pray God, I pray God save the King.
I hear the executioner's good, and my neck is so little."

Larsen used the lute song "If My Complaints" by John Dowland in "Anne Boleyn," which is quoted in both the vocal and piano parts and is relevant to her situation[37]. Anne actually sings the lute song during the section when she is recalling Henry's words to her. Henry wrote many lute songs, and it would have been plausible that Henry wrote some for Anne, so "Larsen wanted to capture his words in a fashion that he might have proclaimed to Anne during their relationship" (Day 43). In this moment, Anne, like Katherine has done previously, appeals to Henry's memory of their love, recreating the scene of his romance. But she soon snaps out of the reverie and back to her current situation, crescendoing into "Try me," in a newfound anger at his cruelty. The piece becomes increasingly desperate, the pitch continuing to rise until her final plea of "try me" which reaches a high C. It's as if she is frantically attempting to be heard above the gossip and politics which surrounds her at court[38].

My staging of this piece is complex in its many parts. It includes three different female icons and sex symbols from different eras of cabaret club culture. Cabaret singers, showgirls and erotic dancers have all experienced misogynistic discrimination. That includes not only assumptions that all dancers will willingly sell their bodies, stereotypes of low intelligence, and

[37] Ibid, 42.
[38] Ibid, 46-47.

extreme policing of their bodies, both because of their female gender and their work in a creative space. Many find artistic and sexual liberation in their work, and often feel most powerful in their femininity onstage.[39] I wanted Anne to portray these dancers as a way of reclaiming and reframing her role as "seducer," "witch" and "whore," all names used to describe sexually liberated women as well as queens who demand respect. She is put on display in the scene, but in a manner where she maintains control, luring Henry into thinking he is safe and showing him – facetiously – that she can be whatever he wants her to be.

The scene starts with Henry walking in, drink in hand, and suit jacket already off. Though there are others in the bar, which we can tell from the sounds around him, he is the main observer, and she dances for him alone. The first girl we see is dressed in a high-necked leotard, fishnets, and a bowler hat. She represents the pre-WWII club life of Germany shown in the film and musical *Cabaret*. In this look I represent Lisa Minnelli's character from the film, Sally Bowles, a sexually liberated Cabaret singer and dancer. In her song *Mein Herr*, Sally dances on and around a chair with her backup girls, which inspired the format of this scene. We see her walking towards Henry and the front of the stage in the first shot, dragging her chair behind her and striking a pose as the first shriek of "Try me, good king" is heard above the bar noise. I choreographed this character's dancing using many of the Bob Fosse moves from the film as well as other jazz technique in the same style. Her movements are not necessarily "sexy" as we view it today, but more angular and striking which adds a tension to the scene.

The next character to be introduced is based off of a classic 1940's showgirl. We see her first in some early flashes, but get our first full look in a pan up from her patent heels to her red lip, boa, white gloves and pearls, mimicking Henry's gaze as he takes her in. The camera does

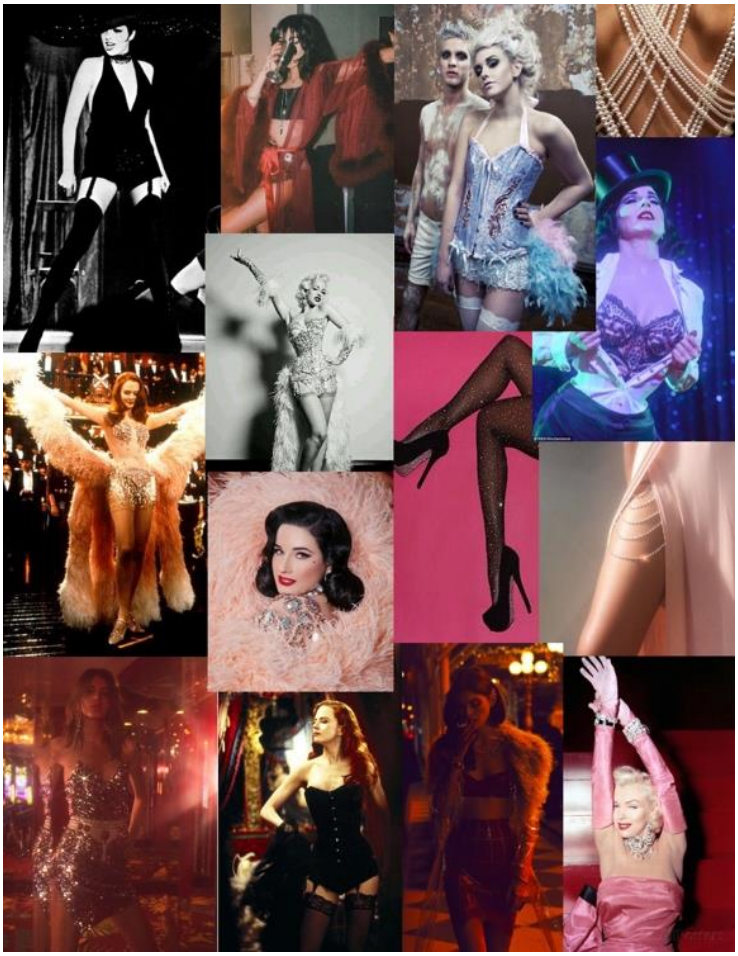
[39] Mort, Frank. "Striptease: The Erotic Female Body and Live Sexual Entertainment in Mid-Twentieth-Century London." *Social History*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2007, pp. 27–53. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4287394.

become Henry's eyes throughout the piece, following each girls' movements in a sexual, observational gaze. This showgirl wears a black and white sequined vintage bodysuit and her movements are much more dramatic. She struts around the stage, taking up space, and waving her boa at her king. I incorporated shimmies, grapevines, and other classic showgirl moves from the early Follies to differentiate the dance styles between women. The third and final dancer is set in the modern day. She wears a shimmery, short dress, collar necklace, and her hair is pulled back to keep it out of her face as she lies across the chair, crouches on top of it, and grinds her body against it. There is more of an overt sexuality and looseness in this dancer's moves which is both beautiful and threatening to Henry.

Throughout these clips of the dancers, we see Henry becoming increasingly agitated. He takes off his tie, unbuttons his collar, and swirls his drink as he watches, though his head remains cut off above the frame throughout. As the piece rises in pitch and in intensity, the cuts between shots become quicker and quicker, adding a sort of violence to the movements. This shift occurs after the lute song Anne reprises, and when she realizes the reality of her situation. On the first held "Try me," she comes behind Henry, moving her hands down his chest. With the flashing lights, we aren't sure if she is going to strangle him or undress him. The same tension occurs as she, now in a different costume, runs her boa across his neck in a flirtatious, yet potentially threatening way. With the intensity of the music beneath, the dance moves, which seemed lighthearted before, are now more severe and almost terrifying. Her direct eye contact with the camera, which is now especially noticeable, seems to be a direct challenge to Henry instead of a sweet flirtation. As the music continues to build, moving into the section where she states her case, singing "let me obtain this request and my innocence shall be known," we get flashes from the other queens' scenes, representing their interconnection and culmination in Anne's act of

liberation. At the climax of the piece, all three dancing girls are overlaid together to signify the different aspects of Anne's character combining in one powerful moment.

In the last section of the piece, which is set to Anne's final words, we see Henry rise from his chair to follow her, slinging his jacket casually over his shoulder. There is no apparent sense of danger anymore, only excitement at being shown a room where they can be together. When the camera turns he is following the showgirl, yet only seconds later she becomes the cabaret dancer as they walk through a red corridor, again nodding to her assumed shape-shifting and manipulative ways. The camera is positioned so that her face is center, but Henry's head is intentionally sliced off by the top of the frame as he follows her. The final shot is of Anne, still dressed in her cabaret clothes, closing the door to her room slowly. As she stares into the lens, a slight smile on her lips, we aren't sure if she is going to make love to Henry or kill him.



Transition 5.

This fifth and final transition into the last chapter depicts the recital E has been preparing for. She paces backstage nervously, and finally walks out onto the stage, followed by pianist, Michael Rivers. She smiles at the audience, calmly planting herself in the crook of the piano and

placing her hand on the side to steady herself. As she begins to sing, Ben's piano accompaniment shifts from G minor to major and surges as she opens her mouth to sing. This final performance in "reality" represents E's newfound confidence in her classical singing. She has arrived at a place of pride and comfort in this classical space and sings passionately and joyfully to her "audience". The only audio that is heard, is Ben's piano playing. I wanted to keep her voice consistently a mystery in these transition scenes, focusing on her emotional journey and keeping the vocals for the characters who "take back the pen" through their performances. E bows and leaves the stages, walking confidently off and letting the chapel door swing closed behind her as the piano signals the turning of the last page in her story: "Enlightenment."

## Chapter 5. Enlightenment

"Your House"

Chapter 5 begins with E opening the doors to a different chapel.This space is much more intimate than Lawrence's chapel, and natural sunlight streams through the windows which sets up a direct comparison to the darkened recital performance. She is still wearing her recital clothes, presumably having come straight there after walking off stage. As she enters this new chapel, we discover along with her a piano draped with white cloth and covered in flowers. There are flowers in vases around the piano, creating an altar of sorts. She doesn't seem surprised that it's there, but explores the space, touching the piano and grounding herself in this magical place that is reminiscent of the scene at Bubolz she finds with her professor. A similar mixing of her outer reality and internal worlds occurs here. As she sits down at the bench and runs her hands along the keys, she begins to sing the hidden track on Alanis Morissette's album *Jagged Little Pill*.

This is the first song we see her actually singing. While the recording was done earlier and lip synced, I really was singing as Alex filmed me and wanted it to look as realistic as possible. This song was also recorded in the Refuge chapel, while the rest were recorded at Lawrence. The space itself was important to me and allowed for the intimate resonance the song needed. I have deep personal ties to the song itself, and Morissette's album which, as music has the power to do, got me through some very hard times this year. I chose this song because of its a cappella nature. At this point in the story E has come into her power, and I wanted to show the vulnerability she is now able to present with her voice in multiple styles, uninhibited by other instruments. The words of the song also add meaning to her story. I imagined her singing, instead of to a person, to her experience as a conservatory student. She sings of how she felt like an imposter at times, sometimes obsessively searching for acknowledgement, sometimes sneaking through and trying not to be noticed.

I went to your house, walked up the stairs
I opened your door without ringing the bell
I walked down the hall, into your room
Where I could smell you.
And I shouldn't be here without permission
Shouldn't be here.

Would you forgive me love
If I danced in your shower
Would you forgive me love
If I laid in your bed
Would you forgive me love
If I stay all afternoon?

I took off my clothes, put on your robe
Went through your drawers and I found your cologne
Went down to the den, found your CD's
And I played your Joni.
And I shouldn't stay long, you might be home soon
I shouldn't stay long.

Would you forgive me love
If I danced in your shower
Would you forgive me love
If I laid in your bed
Would you forgive me love
If I stay all afternoon?

I burned your incense, I ran a bath
I noticed a letter that sat on your desk
It said hello love, I love you so love
Meet me at midnight.
And no, it wasn't my writing
I better go soon
It wasn't my writing

So forgive me love
If I cry in your shower
So forgive me love
For the salt in your bed
So forgive me love
If I cry all afternoon.

The song reaches its climax in the last verse when the narrator finds a letter on her lover's desk from another woman. She cries, "And no, it wasn't my writing, I better go soon, it wasn't my writing." These words are especially poignant for this story. The terror she feels in this realization, that the words, the pen, and the hand are not hers, brings together this same feeling of non-possession and lack of control women experience in the music world that I am trying to remedy in this film.

"Take my Hand"

The last song on the program is an original that I wrote with Sam Farrell, a musician and producer from the Appleton. I wanted the song to be uplifting and representative of E's journey. While the title of the chapter is "Enlightenment," which signifies a type of ending, I wanted to have this moment be forward looking to signify new beginnings. I truly believe that we have multiple incarnations of ourselves throughout our lifetimes, and this one is coming to a close for E.

The lyrics I wrote for this song are ultimately about resilience. The song describes getting over a relationship and knowing it's okay to acknowledge the love that was there, mistakes that were made, and moving forward, but is also an ode to self-reliance in difficult situations. She sings about "spending time inside to straighten out [her] mind," allowing herself the retreat she needs in order to take back her power. She sings also about the boundaries that are necessary in relationships, both with people and with her own thoughts.

I think it's time I go,
Actually I came here all alone, for you.
I think it's time we spoke,
'Bout all the things I never said, to you.

I'll spend some time inside to straighten out my mind
'Till the sun comes out.
I'll make myself a home, so I can be alone
'Till the sun comes out.

I'll board up all our walls
But answer if you call.

It's not too much to take
The greetings that we faked
were only one mistake.

And it's messing with my head,
all the promises we shared
Just to leave them there,
we'll put ourselves to bed
And I, wanted you to know,
I promise I will last the winter snow.

How much of my own weight
Can I put in your place, will your ice break?
No I won't play this game of do you feel the same?
I'll let my grasses grow.

I'll spend some time inside to straighten out my mind
'Till the sun comes out.
I'll make myself a home, so I can be alone
'Till the sun comes out.

And I'll say just what I mean
Fill the spaces in between
I'll even daydream.

And if you follow me inside
I will shine a little light on all the time we had.
Come here and take my hand,
Take my hand.

We wrote the song in a pop doowop style, basing the sound off of music by Amy Winehouse, Tom Misch, and Jessie Ware. These are all favorite artists of mine and each of them capture the laidback swing I wanted to convey in the final scene. When I set the scene however, I only referenced some aspects of the 50s and 60s – doowop's peak – but placed it in a 80/90s vintage arcade bar. While I was dressed in a 60's style mini dress, my backup boys emulated John Travolta's character in the 1978 film *Grease*. I wanted to show the timelessness of this story of heartbreak and resilience by playing with era in this way. Having men sing backup was also uncommon for the musical style, and while they didn't actually sing on the track, I wanted to flip the script on that trope by having them support the lead female singer.

We used a beautiful vintage jukebox, located at The Heist in Ripon, to start the scene, as E drops a quarter into the slot and chooses her last song. There is an agency in this act that was important to show as the recital comes to a close. As the record drops and begins to spin, an image of Ryley, the drummer who played on the song, appears in the jukebox. He hits the opening beats and the scene transitions to the band playing together, presumably inside the machine. E stands in front, singing into a mic with the boys backing her up on drums and guitar

from behind. She immediately situates herself as the leader, which continues as the boys make her drinks from behind the bar, "sing" backup throughout, and sit on either side of her as she plays a game of solo chess. The video is light-hearted to match the song and full of comedic moments like when they doowop boys are intently playing video games but still make sure to look up at the camera to catch their vocal parts. Yet, there are also moments of sincerity, exemplified by E sitting alone at the bar, singing to the camera. She has a sense of self-assuredness that helps us recognize she is not playing a character, but speaking for the first time, as herself.

Conclusion:

*Unpenned* intertwines the journey of a conservatory student finding her voice as both a singer and a woman. This journey through the patriarchal world of classical music is illustrated through my interpretations of operatic female characters portrayed in the literary canon. The stories and characterizations of these women that I overlay on these pieces demonstrate the process through which these characters reclaim their narratives. As E prepares for her senior recital within the context of a music conservatory, we watch her develop through these powerful women, eventually finding her own strength and writing her own story.

In making this film, I wanted to bring to light the violence and disempowerment women face both on and off stage that goes undiscussed in the classical music world. My hope is that including my own personal journey as a singer is relatable to the journey of all female performers in some way. Something beautiful can be made from the pain and violence that women have faced within classical music and the operatic canon, which we first must find the courage to acknowledge, a difficult act in itself. Re-framing and reclaiming that violence is the next step, and a process I am committing myself to through this project and beyond. One thing I especially want to emphasize is that all I have written here is only *my* interpretation. Ultimately, I want each viewer to form their own opinions and take what they need from the art. This essay is a helpful documentation of my process, but the truly special parts of it come from what others see.

My goal is to continue this journey after my time at Lawrence. I hope to continue to explore the process of creativity and empowerment in performance through sharing the stories of women. I am definitely not the same artist or person I was sitting in that dorm room last spring, and in some ways I have the pandemic to thank for giving me time to grow and explore my artistic ability. The production company Alex and I started during the project called “Stretch Your Eyes Productions” is a direct outcome of this time and just one example of how my confidence has grown since stepping onto my first film set last summer. In my eagerness to tell this story, I not only opened new and unexpected doors, but initiated a deep healing within myself that I am grateful for. My greatest hope is that it sparks conversation and acknowledgement of these systemic inequities and the challenges faced by female singers.

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